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Many of the utilities have sales organizations, true. But far too frequently they are technical organizations rather than merchandizing forces. In the street railway organization even the sales force is almost entirely lacking.

In this sense the merchant should not be a mere salesman, as the term usually is applied. He should be a diplomat, a skilled creator of demand and of customers for his product. While the engineer is producing the service and keeping it up to a high efficiency, the merchant is disposing of it. When business is brisk and profitable he is seeing that service is given and appreciated. When times are slack and the margin of profit is low, he seeks selling methods of strengthening business and tiding over the slack period—just as does the successful merchant in other lines.

Rarely is there combined in the one man the technical ability of the engineer competent to produce the service, and the equally commercial ability of the merchant competent to successfully dispose of the stock of "service" in good times and bad.

Eight years of service with public utilities, and a dozen other years of intimate acquaintance with them, while not directly connected with them, has taught me that a crying necessity of utilities is merchandising, that a considerable part of their difficulties would be greatly smoothed by wise merchandising. The same is as true of steam rail-roading as of the more local public utilities.

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ANTIPHHRASIS

SIR:

French Academicians, we are told, in preparing a new edition of their Dictionary, are greatly puzzled over American slang, many words of which they are at a loss to define. From the examples which have been cited, however, one surmises that it is not so much slang that gives them trouble as the perverse and detestable antiphrasis which has in recent years become one of the most annoying, misleading, and altogether pernicious corruptions of current speech. Genuine slang is seldom difficult to interpret. The context makes it clear. Sometimes it is superfluous, sometimes it is vulgar, sometimes it is indefensible. But sometimes, too, it is happily conceived and is an enrichment of the vocabulary, destined on the morrow to become classic speech. An example in point is the word "slang" itself, which is of the origin which itself describes. New words are necessary, from time to time. Some may be formed academically, through grammatical derivation. Others have to be new creations. Doubtless the former class should be—though generally they are not—accordant with etymological principles. The latter must generally be laws unto themselves.

The current and increasingly prevalent antiphrasis is very different. It must be far more puzzling to the foreigner than any slang, and far more

difficult to interpret. It is, moreover, entirely lacking in the quality of necessity, or even of convenience.

Note, for instance, the now general—in even our best newspapers, the practically universal—perversion of the familiar word “alibi.” There is a word which has a specific meaning, and which can properly have no other. Yet it is now almost invariably used in an entirely different and false sense, namely as a synonym and substitute for “excuse.” Such abuse is the more unjustifiable because the word which it replaces is practically as short and certainly as simple and convenient. But some crazy obsession has moved writers to write “alibi” when they mean “excuse,” and I have heard of copy editors actually striking out “excuse” when it was properly used and substituting “alibi”! Nay, I have seen one case in which, through the coöperative perversity of reporter and copy editor, it was stated that “the man was able to prove, in addition to several perfectly good alibis, that he was not at that place at that time”! Apparently the word may mean anything except what it really does mean.

Another long current abuse of a somewhat similar kind, committed, however, with a different motive, is the substitution of “assault” or “attack” for “rape” or “ravish.” Thus we have read that “he seized her by the throat, beat her with his fist until she was almost insensible, and then attacked her,” and in another case that “he struck her several times with a bludgeon, knocking her down and breaking her arm, but did not assault her.” No wonder that French Academicians are bewildered in their efforts to define some of our words!

The list of such solecisms and brutalities might be extended almost indefinitely. They are committed daily by those who so far consider themselves purists in speech as to be shocked at such slang as “boodle” or “hootch.” Yet the latter are immeasurably preferable, or immeasurably less objectionable, for the reason, if nothing more, that they have a definite, unmistakable meaning, while the others have not.

The fact that the French Academicians are taking note of these abominable cases of antiphrasis suggests that there is cause for regret that we have not such a body here to be the censors and guardians of our language. As it is, nobody serves such a purpose. The newspapers have become the worst offenders. The book-publishing houses are often little better, and they have at best no concerted and uniform standard. The dictionary-makers, in their competition for bigness, have made their works inclusive rather than discriminative. The college professors of language and literature are far more given to hunting up examples to justify ill-usage than to condemning it and insisting upon right usage. The result is that the noblest language in the world is being abused and degraded, its beauty marred, precision dulled, and its practical efficiency impaired. Are magazine editors doing anything about it?

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